

**In the Claims:**

**Please enter the following new claims 35 and 36:**

--35. An interconnect comprising:

(a) one or more metal lines formed from a first metal layer, said metal lines having gaps therebetween;

(b) low-k material filling the gaps between the metal lines and having a height and one or more vertical portions;

(c) a protective layer formed directly over the metal lines and the low-k material, wherein the protective layer covers at least one vertical portion of the low-k material, and wherein the protective layer includes an oxide;

(d) a dielectric layer formed over the protective layer, wherein the dielectric layer has a different composition than the low-k material and the protective layer;

(e) one or more vias etched in the dielectric layer;

(f) a metal for filling the vias;

(g) a second metal layer formed over the dielectric layer; and

(h) one or more openings in the protective layer for allowing the metal vias to contact the first metal lines.--

--36. The interconnect of claim 35, wherein the oxide includes silicon dioxide.--